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Forest Service seeks public comments on Flagstaff Watershed Protection Project; Public Meetings Invitation

Flagstaff, Ariz. – The Coconino National Forest Flagstaff Ranger District has published the Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) for the Flagstaff Watershed Protection Project – the project supported by a \$10 million bond approved by Flagstaff voters in 2012. This draft analysis is the product of a multi-agency, science-based collaborative effort to examine the feasibility, effectiveness, and impacts of various treatment options for the project area.

The DEIS is the next major milestone in this groundbreaking, multi-agency effort aimed at reducing the risk of severe fire and flooding in the Dry Lake Hills north of Flagstaff and the Lake Mary Watershed (the City's water supply) south of town.

The DEIS describes the wide spectrum of treatment alternatives on Forest Service land. Options range from aggressive treatments (that would include helicopter and/or cable logging, would provide the largest reduction of risk, and result in the biggest visual impacts in the area), to minimal treatments (resulting in the lowest change to the risk of severe fire and fewer impacts to resources like wildlife and scenery).

All members of the public are urged to provide specific and detailed comments related to the alternatives presented in the analysis. Because the alternatives in the DEIS cover such a wide spectrum, the Forest anticipates the final decision will include a combination of these identified treatment options based on the comments in response to the draft.

“Unlike other projects, we don’t identify a *preferred* alternative and the decision could actually be a blend of the alternatives based on the comments we receive, so public input is crucial in shaping the future of this project,” says Erin Phelps, Project Manager for the Forest Service side of the FWPP. “The voter-approved bond will help pay for implementation, and we want to continue working closely with the community to achieve our shared goal of protecting our vital watersheds.”

The 45-day comment period begins today and ends August 18. The DEIS, along with a Reader's Guide, a Map Packet and other supporting information can be found online at www.fs.usda.gov/goto/FWPP. A limited number of hard copies will be available upon request at the Flagstaff Ranger Station on N Hwy 89.

To provide additional information, answer questions, and collect comments, two public meetings are being held in July.

- ***Open House hosted by the Flagstaff Ranger District***
July 17, 2014
Flagstaff Aquaplex
5:00 p.m. - 7:30 p.m.
- ***Open House hosted by the Greater Flagstaff Forests Partnership***
July 22, 2014
Flagstaff Aquaplex
5:00 p.m. - 7:30 p.m.

Field visits will also be scheduled throughout the summer and fall.

This DEIS effort is one portion of the larger project. Other treatments on State, City, and Forest Service land outside of this planning area, but within the FWPP footprint, began shortly after the bond passed. The partners continue to make progress on this critical effort.

For additional information on the Forest Service efforts of the project, the DEIS, or the Comment Period, contact the Flagstaff Ranger District at 928-526-0866.

For information regarding treatments on state and city land, contact Flagstaff Fire Department Fire Administration at 928-213-2500.

A wealth of information is also available on the project website at www.flagstaffwatershedprotection.org

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